King Cotton in Asia---Big Mills at Shanghai---Boys Work at 4 Cents a Day---What Tobacco Trust Is Doing---Coal Oil

It is unloaded by coolies, who carry it upon their heads.

Chinese child labor. Much of the work in the cotton mills is done by children at 4 cents a day.

IN A SHANGHAI MILL.

BY FRANK G. CARPENTER.

Shanghai.

The growth of Shanghai beats that of the gourd of Jonah, which sprang up in a night. It is now a modern European city. It has business blocks which might be dropped down in New York or London and not be out of place, and residences which would be fine in Washington or Paris. Along the Bund, the wide road which faces the river, are a dozen or more banks whose capital runs into the tens of millions and whose managers are so trusted that they can dip into the pockets of the nations and draw out at pleasure. On the same street are clubhouses, some of which have cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to build. There are big hotels where you can live as well as at home, and shops, with plate glass windows, containing European goods of every description. Shanghai is the Paris of the Far East. It is one of the richest cities of Asia, and it takes the best of all that is going.

In the Big Cotton Mills.

Shanghai is preparing to manufacture for the new China. It is putting up factories and foundries and starting all sorts of new industries. It has silk filatures which are producing bales of raw silk for our American weavers, modern flour mills equipped with Milwaukee machinery, and a cigarette factory owned by the American tobacco trust, which employes more than 1,000 hands. It has eight great cotton mills with several hundred thousand spindles, and some which have 80,000 or 90,000 spindles in a single establishment. In these mills over 30,000 Chinese men, women and children are employed, and they are spinning and weaving cotton quite as well as in any of our American factories. The most of them are managed by Chinese foremen, and they give some idea of how the Celestials expect to make their own cloth in the future.

During my stay here I have visited some of the biggest of the cotton factories. I went through the establishment of the Soy Chee Cotton Spining Company to-day. It lies on the Whampoa River, the branch of the Yangtse which gives Shanghai access to the sea, and it is so situated that the bales can be landed right at the mills and the goods shipped thousands of miles into the interior by means of the rivers, or to Japan or the United States. The suburb connected with it is known as Hongkew. This is a great factory centre, and its smokestacks dot the stream, running along its banks almost to the Yangtse.

Child Labor at 4 Cents Per Day.

The buildings of the Soy Chee Company cover several acres. They are of gray brick and are shadowed by a smokestack which rises to the height of a twelve-story flat. Entering them, I found over a thousand men, women and children at work. I went through room after room filled with girls who were weaving and spinning, and I saw 200 children tending the machines. Some of them were little tots not higher than my waist, and many did not reach to my shoulders. The smaller children were pulling baskets filled with bobbins here and there about the rooms. The larger ones were tending the spinning mules, and all were working so hard that they scarcely looked up as I entered.

I asked as to their wages and found that they were about 4 of our cents per day, and that the pay of the older hands ranged from that to 20 cents. Think of working ten hours for 4 cents, and that in the dust of a spinning mill! I photographed some of the children, frightening the little ones almost to death as I did so. The manager tells me that he has many whole families employed in the factory—father, mother and children all working. There are no laws against child labor, and the babies aid in keeping the wolf from the door.

Speaking of babies, there were several of these in the mill. Some were still at the breast, and their mothers had brought them along that they might not lose work. I remember one girl of eighteen spinning away with an almond-eyed infant on her knees, and another had a baby in a basket beside her. The child was quiet. As I chucked it under the chin two yellow dimples broke out in its cheeks, and it smiled. In another place I saw a three-month-old baby lying in a pile of white cotton waste on the floor of the mill.

Cotton Yarn for Hand Looms.

This factory works day and night, and there are quite as many children employed in the night shift as in the daytime. One thousand hands are always busy, Sunday and week days, all the year through. Its chief product is cotton yarn for the domestic weaves. This is made up into bundles, which are then packed into bales of 400 pounds each, and shipped all over the country. The yarn is woven into cloth on hand looms, and it supplies a large part of the clothing of the common people. It comes into competition with the mills of India and Japan, and also with these which are now starting up in the other parts of China. I am told there are something like 300,000 spindles now working upon such yarn at Shanghai, and also a large number of Ningpo and Soochow. There is one big mill at Hangchow, one at Canton, and some at Hongkong, Wuchang and Hankow. The labor is abundant, and the people easily learn to handle the modern machinery.

New Milling Machinery.

The Chinese are rapidly introducing the better class of machines, and their mills are already about as well equipped as our own. A great part of their machinery is imported from England, and only certain specialties come from the United States. In one factory I found an American light plant with 6,000 electric lamps burning, and in another there were modern fire machines, and the employers had a fire drill every week. In nearly every place the wages were as low or lower than those I have quoted, the highest price paid the men being something like 30 cents per day, while a good average wage was 8 or 10 cents. I found girls at work in all of the factories, and I know of none which does not employ children.

At present a considerable portion of the cotton used in China is imported from abroad. We have the bulk of the Manchurian trade, although Japan is doing its best to compete. The English sell the greater part of the goods brought into the Yangtze Valley and South China, and the Germans are pushing their cloths everywhere. Within the past year or so, however, the Chinese officials have been starting small factories in which hand looms are used. I saw some in Tientsin and other parts of China, and I am told that there are more than 15,000 such looms now at work in that province.

China's Cotton Supply.

China is doing all it can to improve its native cotton. The officials are sending out men to study our cotton belt and our methods of cotton raising, and edicts have been issued to encourage the growth of the crop in all the provinces. It is claimed that cotton will do well in most parts of China. Much of the country lies in the latitude of our Southern States, and from Shanghai northward there are rich plains which the experts say are fitted for cotton growing. With unscientific methods of cultivation the country is now producing something like 70 per cent. of the raw material it uses, and if properly farmed the crop could be enormously increased.

NATIVE COTTON. CHINA RAISES 70 PER CENT. OF ITS OWN COTTON.

The native cotton is of a short staple. It is brought here in boats upon the Yangtze Kiang and its tributaries, and also in seagoing junks from Ningpo and the lands farther south. It is put up in bags of enormous size, but so loosely packed that one twice as large as a feather bed weighs only 200 pounds. It is loaded and unloaded by coolies who carry it upon their heads from the ships to the factory.

Other farmers ship their raw cotton in basket work bales the size of a hogshead. The bales are opened in the cotton yards, and the lint is sometimes rebaled in packages of 500 pounds for export to the United States and Europe. The nature of the native cotton makes it especially good for underwear, and some of it is sent to the United States for that purpose.

A Nation in Cotton.

Our cotton factories should send their agents here to study the market. These people dress in cotton instead of silk, and the most of the cloth used is spun and reeled by hand and woven at home. With the new civilization wages will rise, and the Chinese will wear more cotton than ever before. At present it is safe to say that there are at least 400,000,000 of them who dress in such goods all the year round. They wear only one or two thin garments in the summer, but in winter they have several suits well wadded to keep themselves warm, and in the northern provinces they put on suit after suit as the weather grows colder. Indeed, some fleshy Chinese in full winter dress have trouble in getting through their own doorways. But even at one suit of twenty yards to each person per year the amount of cotton used is so great that at least 8,000,000,000 yards are required. This amount is beyond comprehension. It would carpet a pathway sixty feet wide from the earth to the moon, or cover one more than twenty miles wide from New York to Chicago. Our total shipments of cotton goods to other countries is less than $33,000,000 a year, and all we send to Asia sells for less than $13,000,000. That which goes to China would hardly patch the knees of the Celestials, let alone make their clothes.

How American Oil Lights China.

If our cotton interests could handle this market as the Standard Oil does the exports from our Southern States might run into the hundreds of millions a year. The Standard Oil Company has its own agents in all the provinces, and it is pushing its business in every city. Twenty years ago the oil was shipped here in tin cans. It is now brought in tank steamers which carry 10,000 tons at a load. The vessels start from San Francisco and land at half-a-dozen different ports, where the oil is pumped out into great storage tanks. I found such tanks at Hankow, 600 miles up the Yangtze Kiang, and saw the steamers unloaded by means of a pump. The tanks there hold tens of thousands of barrels. They have factories connected with them, where the tin plate is made into five-gallon cans. These are filled with oil and are distributed by the Yangtze and its tributaries. The stuff is economically handled, being sold in smaller and smaller packages as it gets farther away from the ports, and in some places almost by the spoonful. The Standard Oil Company has tanks at Tientsin and Hongkong. It does by far the biggest oil business in China, although the Burmese, Russian and Sumatra companies compete.

Within the past year one of these latter companies has opened up a new oil territory about 200 miles north of Pekin. The oil is carried in cans on wheelbarrows over 100 miles to a canal and thence floated down to the capital. The wheelbarrow men go in caravans of fifty barrows each. They are paid something like 4 cents gold a day, and other labor is proportionately cheap.

Our Tobacco Trust.

Another American institution which is doing a big business in China is the tobacco trust. It has its agents in all of the cities, and has established several big factories. There is one at Shanghai which employs 2,000 girls in making and packing cigarettes. There is another at Mukden, and a third at Hankow. Indeed, the Americans are changing the Chinese from pipe smokers to cigarette smokers, and machine-made cigarettes are now to be bought as far West as Tibet. The business is done under the name of the British-American Tobacco Company, and it has in its employ both British and American officers. The chief manager is an American, who lives here at Shanghai. He tells me the Chinese are a nation of tobacco smokers, and that they have been raising and using tobacco for over 300 years. The weed was introduced from Manila less than fifty years after Columbus discovered America, and it has been in use ever since, although many of the Chinese Emperors have repeatedly tried to wipe it out. Much tobacco is still smoked in pipes, two kinds of which are in use everywhere. One of these is a dry pipe, which may be of bamboo or clay or wood. Its bowl is small and seldom holds more than a pinch of tobacco. The other pipe is a metal box filled with water, through which the smoke is drawn before it enters the mouth. It has a tube about a foot long, and this bends over at the mouthpiece. This pipe is usually made of copper and silver, or an alloy of copper, zinc, nickel and iron. It is used by both men and women.

The natives make cigarettes of corn husks and bamboo leaves. They also roll tobacco in brown paper. Of late years, however, the rice paper cigarette has come into vogue, and it is used more and more every day by both men, women and children.

Strike of Tobacco Girls.

One of the Americans employed in the tobacco factory at Shanghai tells me they had a big strike the other day. A thousand-odd girls left the establishment and refused to return until their grievance was settled. The trouble, strange to say, came from a coffin.

The girls were in the habit of changing from one department to another without asking the manager, and they looked so much alike that the foreign officials could not tell if they were in their right places. Thereupon a system of badges was instituted, giving to each girl a pin labeled with characters indicating the name of the department to which she belonged. Every girl had to have her own badge and wear it. The badges were round, square or shaped like a keystone, according to the rooms in which the girls worked. It was the last badge which caused the trouble. The day after the order went forth the girls with the keystone pins struck, and the next noon the others went out. It was afterward found that the objection lay in a superstition that the keystone badges would bring bad luck to their wearers, because they were shaped like the head of a coffin. It was some time before this could be remedied and the employes brought into line.

Boycotting the British.

And this brings me to the new boycott which was recently instituted against the British steamers on the Yangtse-Kiang. I am told that some of the companies are losing $1,000 a day and that the Chinese are refusing to ship by them because a certain deck passenger died from a kick given by one of the steamship ticket collectors. The British are much alarmed about the matter and are doing all they can to appease the Chinese.

The first great boycott against foreigners was that imposed upon the Americans, two or three years ago. The merchants of the largest cities then bound themselves not to buy American goods, and imposed a penalty of $40,000 upon any member of their organization who did so. After this boycott was raised, the trouble with the Japanese caused by the importation of arms on the Satsu Maru was instituted, and it was continued until it cost Japan many millions of dollars. About six months ago a Chinese official told me that the damages to Japanese trade had already aggregated more than $40,000,000, and that the guilds of Canton had sworn to make them $150,000,000 before they got through. That boycott was most powerful at Canton. The people there would use nothing Japanese. The women had anti-Japan clubs and the merchants refused to ship in Japanese steamers. The loss of trade created financial distress all over Japan, and the government officials at Tokio were at a loss as to how to handle the situation. Said one of them to me:

"We cannot fight the Chinese because they will not trade with us. The powers would not stand for a war of that kind, and we are practically helpless. This is so because the United States knuckled down and permitted the first boycott. Had she acted otherwise she might have stopped Chinese boycotting forever."

"But how could she do that?"

"Easy enough then, although not at all now, with the precedent established. I was in Pekin at the time the boycott was started, and I told your minister, Mr. Rockhill, how he could stop it. Said I:

"'What your government should do is to make a firm stand against the boycott, and at the same time send a gunboat or so along the coast under pretense of surveying the waters. The ships should stop at the islands, and now and then make an expedition off through the country. The Chinese will become alarmed, but the naval officers can tell them that they are merely surveying for science, adding at the end of each reply a significant question as to what China intends to do as to the boycott. The government will fear that the United States is about to retaliate and an edict will be sent forth that the boycott must be stopped.'"

"And what did Mr. Rockhill say to that?" I asked.

"Oh, replied the Tokio statesman, 'he had not enough backbone to try it. He said he had no doubt but that the plan would work, but that he did not dare to suggest it. When I asked why not, he significantly said: 'I don't dare to do it. I don't dare. Our Teddy would jump at it in a minute.'

"And," concluded this man, "I have no doubt but that President Roosevelt would have jumped at it; and had he done so there would have been no further trouble as to American goods and none as to other foreign goods in the future. As it is now the psychological moment has passed; and not you only, but also we and all others must get on our knees to these boycotting Celestials."

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